

THE SHANG DYNASTY

1700 BCE – 1000 BCE



The Shang Dynasty was the first civilization in China. They invaded an area around the Huang He or Yellow River. The Shang people built the first cities and also introduced the use of a river for irrigation of crops. The Shang Dynasty existed during the Bronze Age and the Shang people produced some of the finest bronze work in the world. One of the first emperors was Tang. The Shang Empire stretched over 40,000 square miles. The capital city was moved often due to flooding and also for defensive reasons.

The Shang people also had a bureaucracy where government was organized at different levels. One of the most important levels was the army, which allowed the Shang Dynasty to expand its boundaries.

The economy was based on agriculture and the leading crops were millet and rice. The Shang had no plows; they used wooden sticks. It was during the Shang Dynasty that the Chinese began to raise silk worms to produce silk. This process was kept a secret in China for hundreds of years. Farmers also raised pigs and chickens.



The Shang people produced the first Chinese writing system. This first system was a series of pictures. Often these picture writings were written on turtle shells. The Shang also had many dialects or variations of their language.



The Shang Dynasty was responsible for developing a white clay called kaolin. When it is fired it had a shiny translucent finish. This clay was responsible for building a pottery industry that would last for hundreds of years. Chinese pottery was eventually known around the world.

The Shang Dynasty used two calendars one based on the sun and one on the moon. The lunar calendar was used to record public and private events.

Ancestor worship was very important to the Shang people. When a man died, the ancient Chinese believed his spirit lived on in the afterworld. They believed their ancestors had magical powers. These magical powers allowed their ancestors to punish them or to help them. To keep their ancestors happy, they brought gifts of food and wine to special places or temples. They held many celebrations to honor their ancestors.

The religion of the Shang people was a combination of belief in spirits called animism and ancestor worship. To communicate with their ancestors, the Shang kings used *oracle bones*. The bones were the shoulder bones of animals. Priests heated the bones and interpreted the cracks. The Shang also killed animals and humans as gifts to the gods.

In the 1100's warring people invaded the Shang Dynasty. Chariots began to be used by the army throughout all of China, but it did not help with protecting Shang China. The last Shang king was Di-xin who could not protect his kingdom and the Zhou people overthrew the dynasty.

